

SEPTEMBER 14, 1978

Mornings have been dawning so lovely that the songs from the most talented birds sound dull. Dew changes the Shortgrass Country into a different world. A world of sweet green mints and ruffled wild parsleys. A world of desert ferns and delicate purple blossoms that bloom up underneath tall strands of rich grass and succulent weeds.

More rain has fallen in the past week. Clouds build up as effortlessly as they do on the coast, or in the kinder climates of the South. Showers soften the nights. On the rainy afternoons, I have naps that are worthy of special articles in medical journals. Great peace has come to the Shortgrass Country. Folks that want to leave now are hopeless soreheads.

Goat Whiskers the Younger is sapping his good spirits trying to find a dry day to shear his sheep. Whiskers has built up a head of steam to shear that lacks about 16 pounds of pressure of reaching the highest boiler reading ever made on the Southern Pacific line in the steam engine days. He and his Spanish speaking shearing captain have spent enough money on long distance phone calls, setting and breaking appointments, to have hired an out-of-state contractor to build a shearing barn complete with a wool dryer. The longest conversation they've had was clocked at 14 minutes of English monologue interrupted by 76 "si, senors." As it's going now, Whiskers is going to be the first herder in Texas to go out of business because of bronchitis. If his old lady doesn't get him off the phone, he's going to rupture his voice box.

We can't get over to help him gather his sheep. Whiskers' ranch is six miles around by the highway from ours. The farthest we've been able to get a pickup to run since the rains was about the distance that a right fresh kid runs in a spring relay.

I've told you before how temperamental the doctor of motors is over at Mertzson. Well, whether I have or I haven't doesn't matter, as I'd have to tell you every day to keep you current. In fact, I'd have to report every half day, because every time he skins his knuckles he threatens to burn down his shop. Even with just 10 knuckles and, say, 30 wrenches to slip, that makes for a lot of tension at his place.

Anyway, when the pickups started falling apart, I told him to either move out here or make a deal with the railroad to ship the pickups to town. He's got so spoiled he won't make house calls. It's surprising how fast an old boy can be cured of lying under a pickup out on the range with dust blowing under it at slightly over 200 miles an hour. He could probably make \$16 or \$17 more a week if he'd work out-of-doors.

After the mechanic turned us down, I thought about having a dirt contractor bury the whole fleet. I read about a high stepper up on the plains that buries Cadillac's on his ranch. In the picture, he looked real self-satisfied. Burying a \$600 pickup might not be as thrilling as interring a Coupe de Ville, but I'll tell you one thing, you'd be getting away from about as much expense.

I am going to savor the wet days. Whiskers will have all winter to shear. Jogging is a big sport in the cities, and it looks like it's going to spread to this ranch.